



## Hybrid Town Meeting Study Committee

Date: Thursday, December 14, 2023.

Time: 7:30 - 9:00 PM.

In-Person Location: Town Hall Annex 2nd Floor Conference Room.

Remote access: Zoom.

### Minutes

#### ***Members in attendance:***

Alex Bagnall, Kerrie Fallon (remote), Peter Gast (remote), Rebecca Gruber, Guillermo Hamlin (remote), Sayed Khodier (Town Staff ), Steve Storch.

#### ***Other attendees:***

Juli Brazile, Town Clerk.

Meeting started at 7:30.

#### ***1. Reviewed and approved 11/27/23 Meeting Minutes***

Alex Bagnall proposed, Steve Storch seconded. Unanimous vote to approve.

Alex Bagnall has set up a shared drive for our draft minutes and other meeting materials for ease of viewing. There is a template for the agenda / minutes on the shared drive.

#### ***2. Identify Study Committee project tasks and assign responsibilities***

1. Surveying Town Meeting members and community members.
2. Researching the hybrid Town Meeting practices of surrounding communities.
3. Investigating the legal landscape / state authorization of hybrid town meetings with Town Counsel.

Agreed that initially, we don't need to investigate potential technology solutions.

Alex Bagnall and Rebecca Gruber volunteer for the survey development.

Steve Storch, Kerrie Fallon, and Guillermo Hamlin volunteer to look at surrounding communities' hybrid Town Meeting practices.

Pete Gast, Guillermo Hamlin, and Rebecca Gruber volunteer to investigate the legal landscape.

## **Discussion of survey development**

Possible questions for Town Meeting members: Would people attend all of Town Meeting remotely, or is this about one-off circumstances. What qualities of the in-person meeting are important to reproduce remotely? Desired timeframe for deciding to attend remotely? Demographics of TMM respondents: e.g., precinct? Length of tenure? Thoughts / opinions about the past remote participation options, i.e., entirely remote, separate spaces?

Possible questions for the general public: Would one be more likely to run for TMM if there were a hybrid option? Particularly ask the Disability Commission to help with the dissemination of the survey.

## **Discussion of researching other towns' hybrid town meeting practices**

Juli Brazile will find out if there are upcoming hybrid town meetings we can observe / attend as well as a list of towns that have already held a hybrid town meeting or are investigating holding a hybrid town meeting. Brookline, Belmont, Burlington, and Plymouth have run hybrid town meetings. Lexington is considering it or has done it. Belmont Town Clerk shared with Juli Brazile notes about their and other Towns' hybrid meeting experiences. (The notes from the Belmont Town Clerk are included at the end of these minutes.)

Potential questions to ask of other towns (via Town Clerks, Moderators, etc.): What was the deliberative experience? What went well and what went poorly? What technology was used? How did the technology influence the experience? What additional effort / town resources were needed to support the hybrid meeting? How did Towns deal with accessibility and equity for people with different internet access? Did they have a problem with Zoom bombers and the like?

## **Legal Questions**

Is the Study Committee tasked with long term changes, or just until March 2025? The State's hybrid town meeting authorization is temporary, but the SC doesn't think that we should focus on that date at this time. The State legislature seems inclined to repeat temporary authorization.

What are our options for the definition of quorum? What is the town's legal position to ensure remote access and to prevent disruptions, e.g., Zoom bombers, technical difficulties, etc.? What is the Town's exposure to litigation if a Town Meeting member's vote isn't counted or they are dissatisfied with their ability to participate remotely in some way? Discuss with Michael Cunningham, Town Counsel.

### ***3. Scheduling of future meeting and minute taker***

Next meeting: 7:00-8:30 PM Monday Jan 22nd, and the fourth Monday of the month generally. Remote and 2nd floor Town Hall Annex Conference room.  
Alex Bagnall will take minutes next time.

### ***4. New business***

The Study Committee decides to add public comment to the agenda.

Alex Bagnall proposed adjournment and Steve Storch seconded. It passed unanimously.  
Meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

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**Email Communication from Juli Brazile to Rebecca Gruber on 12/08/23:**

Belmont just did a hybrid Town Meeting and their Clerk shared the following with the Town Clerk list:

Belmont ran three hybrid Special Town Meeting sessions over the last two weeks.

I can finally report for those who are interested. I heard from Kelly in Plymouth, who has held several, and Amy in Burlington who had just concluded one. Their advice was so valuable.

The most critical pieces of information that each of the three Towns emphasize:

1. Sound – make sure that you have people focused ONLY on sound in the auditorium so that the people in the Auditorium can hear the Zoom participants clearly. Each of the Towns worked closely with their local community cable station folks who routinely broadcast the Town Meetings; those folks have extensive experience. However, if you choose to have a video monitor to display the Zoom participants in the Auditorium with speakers included, they/you will need to have an additional “Sound Engineer” who just watches and adjusts that sound system during the meeting.
2. Electronic voting system – make sure that your electronic voting system, if you have one, is all mobile for in person and remote (requiring adequate Wifi to handle all of the additional in-person mobile devices) can either handle both in person AND remote voters and provide “instantaneous” counts on all motions or use only all remote devices for just one total. If you have any Town Meeting Members who don’t have a smart phone or a tablet, consider deploying any tablets that your Town May have to those people to make voting possible. In Belmont several years ago, we had purchased some inexpensive Android tablets to assist election workers to help the voters find their polling places, so we just redeployed them to the non-smart phone people. Some Towns have Town Meeting Members inform them/sign up to qualify to participate remotely, others do not. Advance qualifications mean that when the Town Meeting Member changes their mind at the last moment and shows up in person, you’ll need a process to verify that person so votes on only one of their devices is counted.
3. Emergency voting – make sure that you have an option for both in-person and remote folks to cast Emergency Votes in case their voting system doesn’t work for them. In Belmont, our Emergency Vote team, consisting of 2 people with telephones in the auditorium, received calls and helped anyone in the auditorium.

For Belmont only, I can say that coordination and advance practice/rehearsals were key so we didn’t miss any parts. On Town Meeting night, it took almost twice the people to run the Hybrid session than an in-person session, after all you’re running BOTH an in-person meeting AND a remote meeting AND you’re coordinating the two. Feel free to contact me directly should you want/need additional info.